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Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 DOE-11 SOE-02 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00
OMB-01 /091 W
----------126685 120924Z /10
R 120837Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4284
INFO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDIP JA XF
SUBJECT: JAPANESE FONMIN DEPARTS FOR MIDDLE EAST

REF: A. TOKYO 0471; B. 77 TOKYO 19502

1. JAPANESE FONMIN SUNAO SONODA, JUST BACK FROM A TRIP TO MOSCOW (REF A), DEPARTS JANUARY 13 FOR 7-DAY TOUR OF 4 MIDDLE EASTERN NATIONS WHICH COLLECTIVELY SUPPLY ALMOST 70 PERCENT OF JAPAN'S ANNUAL OIL NEEDS. SONODA'S ITINERARY IS AS FOLLOWS: HE ARRIVES IN TEHRAN JANUARY 14 FOR 1-DAY "UNOFFICIAL" VISIT. HE WILL PAY CONDOLENCE CALL IN KUWAIT ON 15TH AND THEN FLY ON TO UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, WHERE HE WILL REMAIN UNTIL JANUARY 17TH. HE WILL THEN TRAVEL TO SAUDI ARABIA FOR A 2-DAY VISIT, AND STOP OVER IN TEHRAN ON HIS WAY BACK TO TOKYO.

2. SONODA HAS LONG HELD VIEW THAT HIGH-LEVEL EXPRESSION OF JAPANESE "FRIENDLY INTEREST" IN MIDDLE EAST WAS OVERDUE (LAST FONMIN VISIT TO REGION WAS 1975), WHILE SOME
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OFFICIALS IN FONOFF MIDEAST BUREAU HAD SUGGESTED THAT, IN LIGHT OF RECENT SADAT INITIATIVES AND SUBSEQUENT ARAB SPLIT, BEST COURSE WAS TO KEEP AS LOW PUBLIC PROFILE AS POSSIBLE (REF B). SONODA'S PUBLICLY EXPRESSED DESIRE TO VISIT MIDEAST BETWEEN HIS TRIP TO MOSCOW (ENDING JANUARY 12) AND OPENING OF DIET (JANUARY 21) PUT TIGHT TIME FRAME ON VISIT AND RESULTED IN IRAN

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BEING ABLE TO RECEIVE SONODA ONLY UNOFFICIALLY.

3. ACCORDING TO FONOFF'S 2ND MIDDLE EAST DIVISION POLOFF ITO, KEY TO GREEN LIGHT ON FONMIN VISIT WAS SETTLEMENT OF PROBLEMS CONCERNING CONSTRUCTION OF PETROCHEMICAL PLANT IN SAUDI ARABIA. MITSUBISHI, MAIN JAPANESE COMPANY INVOLVED, HAD WANTED TO PULL OUT OF DEAL LAST OCTOBER, AND THIS GREATLY IRRITATED SAUDIS. A JAPANESE DELEGATION WAS SENT TO SAUDI ARABIA IN DECEMBER, AND WORKED OUT A JOINT-VENTURE AGREEMENT, WITH GOJ COOPERATION, TO BUILD PLANT. THIS CLEARED WAY FOR FONMIN VISIT, SOMETHING GOJ HAD BEEN TRYING TO SET UP SINCE LAST FALL.

4. ITO FORESAW NO OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS WITH ANY OF THE COUNTRIES SONODA WILL VISIT. HE MENTIONED THAT ONE TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION IN ABU DHABI WILL BE TECHNICAL COOPERATION. HE ALSO STATED THAT IN TEHRAN FONMIN WILL BE HOSTED AT LUNCHEON BY IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, BUT GOJ DID NOT KNOW AS YET IF SONODA WOULD SEE THE SHAH. MANSFIELD

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